Maryland Lawmakers Float Ambitious Plan to Fix Metro

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ABSTRACT (ENGLISH)

According to the lawmakers, about $170 million would be needed to keep Metro stable. Besides Barron and Kormán, the other lawmakers are Dels. The Maryland plan outlined in the COG document proposes that some money come from the state's Transportation Trust Fund, but the concern there is jurisdictions outside Prince George's and Montgomery counties having to help fund a transit agency they don't use.

FULL TEXT

Ten Maryland lawmakers propose several changes to advance Metro that include drastically reducing the size of board of directors, allow each jurisdiction to decide how to fund the agency and grant more power to Metro's inspector general.

The proposal supports Metro General Manager Paul Wiedefeld's contention in April that the agency needs at least $500 million in new annual funding. According to the lawmakers, about $170 million would be needed to keep Metro stable.

The 29-page document, labeled "Metro Reform: A Maryland Approach," represents the first comprehensive proposal to improve the beleaguered agency from those who use Metro in the District, Maryland and Virginia.

In the Maryland General Assembly this year, Delegates Erek Barron of Prince George's County and Marc Korman of Montgomery County co-chaired a group striedy focused on Metro that attempted to pass legislation toward creating a regional Metro Safety Commission.

"It's a difficult issue substantively and politically, but Delegate Kormán and I and the eight others who signed on to this got elected to solve problems," said Barron (D-District 24) of Mitchellville, one of the 10 Democratic lawmakers who backed the Metro reform plan. "This is a big problem ... and requires someone to step up and throw some solid ideas out there."

Besides Barron and Kormán, the other lawmakers are Dels. Jazz Lewis, Carlo Sanchez and Jimmy Tariau and state Sen. Joanne Benson from Prince George's and Dels. David Moon, Andrew Platt and Jheanelle Wilkins and state Sen. Brian Feldman from Montgomery.

One major part of the proposal overhauls Metro's board of directors to only three with transportation secretaries from Maryland and Virginia and the director of transportation from D.C. The current structure has 16 members - half of them voting and other half alternates - from D.C., Maryland and Virginia and representing the federal government.

Other changes in the governance portion of the proposal:

* Each jurisdiction and a federal government representative can still serve on the board, but cannot cast votes.
* Eliminate the jurisdictional veto, which currently exist that allows a locality to not allow resolutions to pass.

"When everyone is in charge, no one is in charge," the lawmakers wrote. "A governance system needs to be put in place that creates more - not less - political accountability."

The proposal also recommends ways to bolster Metro's inspector general, such as appointing the position to seven-year terms instead of five. In addition, that person would not only report to the board, but work independently and also have access to all Metro records.

The document doesn't address funding sources for the agency, saying that a solution to that matter is one for the

jurisdictions involved to determine.
The Maryland lawmakers lay out options for possible funding sources such as sales, property and gas taxes.
The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) board approved a "statement of principles on Metro" last month to create a regional plan by the fall.
The council recommendations include having local governments contribute $650 million annually to Metro by no more than 3 percent, restructuring the Metro Compact agreement used to create the transit system and requesting contributions from the federal government since its workforce utilizes Metrorail.
The Maryland plan outlined in the COG document proposes that some money come from the state's Transportation Trust Fund, but the concern there is jurisdictions outside Prince George's and Montgomery counties having to help fund a transit agency they don't use.
Another financial option floated in the plan would be to enact taxes only in Prince George's and Montgomery counties strictly for a creating a Metro Capital Trust Fund.
"Metro reform is sorely needed and long overdue," the council wrote. "A major component of that reform is dedicated funding, but funding alone is not the solution. The changes proposed here represent that broader reform."

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